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ABSTRACT

The use of video recorders in the speech communication classroom focuses learning on self-evaluation and self-improvement, making it possible for real and permanent changes in behavior to occur. Effective use of this medium requires adherence to three principles: (1) the extensive use of positive reinforcement; (2) the provision of immediate and private feedback; and (3) the provision for multiple recorded experiences, each building upon the preceding one. The decreasing size, complexity, and cost of the equipment have made it increasingly accessible and easy to handle. The minimum essential equipment, consisting of a cassette video recorder, a small monitor, a camera on a light tripod, and a microphone, can be obtained for less than $3,000. If the department is able to handle a complex system, all equipment can be arranged in a small area in the rear of the classroom, so that the instructor can operate the equipment in one place and students can organize and conduct the activities. In addition to using the videotape for student self-improvement in any course encouraging student participation, instructors can use the equipment and principles described for improving their own teaching techniques and communication skills. Staff development programs can involve consultants working with individual instructors or small groups of teachers working together. Faculty and students, given the power to see and hear themselves as others do, can be motivated to achieve more effective communication skills. (AYC)

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INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION MONOGRAPH

USING VIDEOTAPE FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

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INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION MONOGRAPH

USING VIDEOTAPE FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

"O, wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us. . . ."

Modern technology has become the "giftie" Robert Burns dreamed and wrote about in 1785 and has given us this power to see ourselves as others see us and free us from our many blunders.

In language development, first listening and then speaking is emphasized by parents during the first six years of the child's growth. Then reading and writing become the predominant language emphasis of our school system for the next twelve years, so much so that formal listening and speaking instruction is virtually ignored. However, various studies have shown that at least 70% of messages in adult life are transmitted and received orally, and of those, 90% of the meaning is through non-verbal channels. The teaching of speech communication in community colleges has for some time no longer been a "how now, brown cow" or a "how to" course but encompasses a wide variety of activities, usually a progressive development in one or more of these areas:

(1) Interpersonal communication: one on one; dyadic encounters, etc.
(2) Small group communication: one with a few; discussions, panels, etc.
(3) Oral presentations: one to many; reports, speeches, etc.

Current studies and our own experiences reinforce that the strongest motivation for any real, permanent change in behavior comes from within the self. The next strongest motivation for change is peer suggestion, and the least strongest is teacher evaluation which represents authority.

However, in attempting to handle the myriad of activities necessary in the modern communication classroom, the exact opposite takes place. The teacher traditionally does most of the evaluating and prescribing for

improvement. Sometimes, peer input is employed in the form of oral suggestions and/or rating sheets from the class. Occasionally, the student is asked to comment on his or her impressions.

The use of the video recorder in the classroom to tape and provide immediate feedback to the student can put the learning process back into its most effective order. It makes the viewing of the self an intense, personal experience and builds internal motivation for change. We can utilize this modern technology and equipment now readily and economically available for us to provide this potent tool for self-improvement. We are surrounded by a world of rapidly increasing use of all kinds of television (commercial, public, pay, cable), video games, and computers. As a result, the small screen has become the most powerful attention device in modern society.

Videotaping in schools is generally used for recording other commercial and educational programs or producing educational programs. Audio tape has long been universally used to play back pre-recorded and pre-produced materials. In homes, video equipment has skyrocketed in popularity but is used mostly to record television programs for later playback and to play commercial films. It is also gradually taking the place of home movies to record family weddings and birthday parties. But despite this explosive expansion, audio- or videotaping for recording and playing back for self-improvement purposes is seldom done.

I have been employing the videotape method in the classroom for the past twelve years and believe it to be the most significant tool for student development of communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal. Although students are initially scared, they also are excited and, at the end of the semester, write in their course evaluations that the videotape was the most helpful and important part of the class.

In using the video recorder to tape students in the classroom, it is vital that the teacher actually put into practice the widely-accepted principle of positive reinforcement. Students come to the community college with many negative feelings about themselves in general, and these can be heightened particularly when hearing and seeing themselves for the first few times. When seeing snapshots of ourselves, we tend not to like what we see. One usually says when hearing one's own voice, "That doesn't sound like me," or "I don't like the way I sound." So, the first most important principle when using the video recorder with students is to stress the positive elements continuously throughout the semester. Suggestions for improvement can certainly be made after several experiences with the videotape. These should not be offered in a negative manner, but rather be built upon the positive comments given earlier. In fact, a helpful suggestion might be to use the old "sandwich" technique: a positive comment, then a suggestion for improvement, followed by another positive comment. All comments from the teacher need to be given with a genuine smile and warmth.

A second important principle when using the videotape is to provide private feedback and immediate feedback as soon as possible after recording. The videotape should be viewed only by the individual or small group who has recorded the tape and not by all the class on the classroom monitor. Otherwise the intense personal experience becomes a public one (as well as taking twice as much classroom time).

A third important principle when using the videotape for self-evaluation is that the student must have many recorded experiences. The first time should be strictly for fun and be an enjoyable activity. It is even possible to precede the first videotaping with audiotaping alone in order to relieve the stress of the first time. Each experience then builds on the preceding one. Students generally begin their observations with superficial comments

regarding appearance, i.e. "I guess I play with my hands too much," and "I really need to lose some weight." Gradually, after several experiences with the videotape, students will then proceed to more in-depth comments on content and organization, i.e. "Our group's visual material really held everyone's attention," and "The structure of my points made everything more clear." Most important is that students will begin to internalize the video experience, will accept that what they see and hear is really themselves, and will decide for themselves what they want to improve in order to present a better image to themselves and to others.

As far as the video recording equipment itself, most community colleges have helpful instructional media or audio-visual departments that can provide assistance. The decreasing size, complexity, and cost of the equipment have made it increasingly accessible and easy to handle. Any teacher can learn how (even a "klutz" like me!), as the equipment over the past few years has become relatively simple and much easier to handle since the early days of black and white reel-to-reel videotape.

The equipment needs to be as unobtrusive as possible in a regular classroom setting (not a studio). It is best to have a technician set it up, if not a permanent part of classroom equipment, but it is not a good idea to have an outsider present during the class session itself. The teacher or a student in the class can easily handle whatever is necessary once the equipment is in place and ready to go.

It is also best not to have the position of the microphones obvious; hanging one or two omnidirectional mikes from the ceiling or from a light fixture is much better than using a mike stand or a lavelier mike clipped to the clothing. Modern color cameras are small and can now obtain a fairly good screen image with ordinary classroom lighting. In other words, keep everything simple and basic and unobtrusive, so that the equipment becomes

just something else in the classroom, like the chairs and chalkboard. The teacher's goal should be to record the communication interaction in the classroom, not to strive toward a technically perfect auditory and visual production.

Therefore, the minimum essential equipment can consist of a cassette video recorder, a small monitor, a camera on a light tripod, and a microphone (approximate cost under $3,000). Immediate feedback is possible with one additional playback machine and small monitor (additional cost of approximately $1,600). The cassette can be rewound quickly, popped out of the recorder, and immediately put into the playback machine. The playback can be located in the back of the classroom and the second monitor viewed using earphones, or it can be placed just outside in the hall or in an adjoining office. In this way, classroom activities can continue without much pause, and videotaping does not require double class time, one for recording and one for playing back. In addition, the second machine insures the necessary private and immediate feedback.

If the department is able to develop a slightly more complex system, all the equipment can be arranged in a small room or area in the rear of the classroom, using a screen or wall with an upper-half glass partition. This arrangement enables the instructor to easily operate the camera, recorder, and playback all in one place. In fact, an additional simple "voice over" microphone can also be added so that the instructor can record comments on the same tape simultaneously as the students are speaking in the classroom. The student then hears both when viewing the tape. This system would mean, of course, that the classroom activities would need to be organized and conducted by the students themselves (a worthwhile goal in itself), and the teacher would then be free to operate the equipment and make comments.

There are a number and a variety of possibilities. A larger classroom monitor may be used occasionally to show models to the entire class or to reinforce further an example of a positive contribution (with the permission of the student who is being shown, of course). To become even more sophisticated, a classroom can be equipped with two cameras, one from the back of the room and one facing the front of the room. Thus, using a split screen mixer, the students being recorded can later see both the speakers and listeners at the same time on the monitor, invaluable for teaching the importance of non-verbal communication and other basic principles.

The technique of using videotape for self-improvement can easily be adapted to other departments' needs, especially those where various kinds of student participation are encouraged. For example, it could be used by a political science class for group discussions on current issues, by a psychology class for demonstrating and practicing methods of role playing, by a nursing class for developing bedside communication skills, etc.

In addition to using the videotape for self-improvement of students, instructors can use the equipment and methods described for the improvement of teaching techniques. At Cerritos College we have been including video recording as part of our staff development program. In order for the process to be as non-threatening to the teacher as possible, it should be independent of administration and of evaluation for purposes of retention and promotion.

In addition to teaching speech, I have been given released time to function as a communication consultant with my peers. I confer with individual teachers from all areas of the campus regarding their objectives and methods in the classroom. Then I visit a class or two, often audiotaping first as an introductory step; following that, I will come and videotape the class. The teacher then sets his or her own goals to work on, and the entire process is repeated again later in the semester to check on progress. Just as with

students, the immediate impact on the teachers involves a concern with delivery aspects. And just as with students, the stress is on positive reinforcement to help the teachers to decide on their own areas for self-improvement. The teacher can also become involved in the subject matter in a detached manner and can make observations that are impossible with other methods of evaluation. All class discussions, conferences, and even the choice to be involved with the videotape program are kept strictly confidential; it is the teacher's choice whether or how much to share with colleagues, the department head, etc.

This process can also be easily adapted to different situations. Simple equipment can be used. Commitment from administration provides necessary consultant time for a faculty member who is trained in communication and various teaching techniques and who also is well-liked and trusted. A similar process can be utilized in small groups, such as with three or four instructors from the same teaching area who could be involved together in the post-recording conferences or who could present mini-lessons for each other to be videotaped and discussed. Some of this micro-teaching has been done in teacher training institutions for some years, and it has been spreading to experienced instructors in higher education, as well.

Equipment is becoming smaller and easier to use. A video system which uses a video cassette not much larger than an audio casette is now available. In progress is the development of a smaller hand-held complete unit which includes the recorder, camera and microphone.

The chief principle in using videotape for self-improvement purposes is to adapt the equipment and the process to your own situations and purposes. Make it important and make it fun. Modern technology has given us the power to truly see and hear ourselves as others see and hear us. Let us use that power to motivate persons to achieve more effective communication skills.

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